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⁴⁰EPA refuses to pull brochure

Lone CAG member challenges technical information

BY ROGER MORRIS

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EPA on-site manager Jim Christiansen refused a request at last week's Community Awareness Group meeting to cease distributing a four-page handout titled "Living with Vermiculite."

He said the information is good for the public and provides a benefit.

CAG board member Clinton Maynard questioned some of the information in the brochure and said it makes people too comfortable living with vermiculite contaminated by toxic tremolite asbestos.

"There is information in here that is flat wrong," Maynard said. "There is information in here if about chrysotile, it's true but if it's about amphibole, it's a flat lie. I want it pulled. It's dangerous."

Christiansen defended the brochure accusing Maynard of trying to live in an "ideal world that is impossible to attain."

"If you have a small release of vermiculite from around an electrical outlet, is the EPA going to mobilize to clean it up?" Christiansen asked. "No. It's not practical. It's not unreasonable for homeowners to clean up a small amount of vermiculite."

The EPA is working on producing additional brochures for contractors and homeowners, Christiansen said.

"I don't want to argue with you," Maynard said. "I want it pulled."

"I'm not going to pull it," Christiansen said.

Maynard requested that Dr. Aubrey Miller, EPA toxicologist, and Chris Weiss, senior toxicologist and natural enforcement investigator, be requested to talk to the next CAG meeting about the issue.

Audience member Eva Thomson spoke up saying, "We live in an imperfect world and they (EPA) are doing the best they can."

Norita Skramstad joined a chorus of support for the EPA saying that in New York City "There are 3800 people living in an apartment building near Ground Zero who can't get their homes cleaned up unless they pay for it."

"My job is to do the very best I can given the tools provided for me," Christiansen said. "I work for the government and I'm a slave to many masters."

Les Skramstad said the EPA on-site coordinator hears the complaints because he is accessible to local people.

"But we complain because of our concerns for our unborn children and grandchildren," he continued.

The "Living with Vermiculite" brochure is available at the EPA Information Center on Mineral Avenue in Libby. It provides "basic tips" for homeowners, contractors or other service providers who are likely to encounter vermiculite in their home or work environment. It calls for common sense and for people to limit exposure to vermiculite contaminated by tremolite asbestos.

In other business, Christiansen said Superfund cleanup activities were on target to complete 200 houses this year.

Results from the 16,000 soil samples taken over the years would be mailed out to property owners during the summer months.

Plans for a cleanup on school grounds and buildings will be revealed this summer and the EPA will be taking down some buildings deemed too dilapidated to save. And the cleanup will take care of some contamination found at J. Neils Memorial County Park. That work is expected to take place early this spring before use of the park increases.